

Fairbury Woman Countered Tokyo Rose in World War II

By: Dale C. Maley
For: FairburyNews.net
Date: December 1, 2025

During World War II, several English-speaking women were hired by the Japanese Empire to broadcast propaganda on the radio to American service members in the Pacific Theater and their families in North America. The goal was to demoralize Allied forces abroad and their families back home. These women were commonly referred to as "Tokyo Rose" by the American press.

A Fairbury native, Virginia Claudon, while serving with the Red Cross in India and Pakistan, was recruited to make nightly radio broadcasts to counter Tokyo Rose's negative propaganda. Her upbeat reports about the War, coupled with entertaining music, helped to lift the spirits of American military personnel in the Pacific Theater.

The family story of Virginia Claudon began with the birth of Nicholas Claudon in France in 1800. In 1836, Nicholas married Barbara Baechler in France. Nicholas was 36, and Barbara was 22 when they married. They had five sons and three daughters in France. Most of Nicholas Claudon's eight children eventually emigrated to the Fairbury area.

For over 100 years, the Claudon family was involved with various Fairbury businesses. Most of these were started by descendants of one of the sons of Nicholas Claudon. This son was Andrew Baechler Claudon. He emigrated to Chenoa in 1867 and then to Fairbury in 1869. Andrew ran the Fairbury grain elevator with his brother Nicholas Jr. and owned the Claudon State Bank in Fairbury. A. B. Claudon married Mary 'Mollie' Alice McDowell, and they had five children.

Besides the Claudon Bank, which is now the Lost In Time Restaurant, descendants of A. B. Claudon operated a grain elevator, a livery stable, and a car dealership.

Virginia Claudon, the World War II radio announcer, was a descendant of another son of Nicholas Claudon Sr. (1800-1893), Nicholas B. Claudon Jr. (1855-1915), who emigrated to Chenoa in 1873. Nicholas initially worked on the Flanagan farm of his brother-in-law, Dan King. He then became a partner in the Danvers mercantile business of Stuckey & Claudon. Nicholas then established the firm of Claudon Brothers in Fairbury, which was a grain elevator business. Nicholas married Mary Ann Schirtz, and they had two children.

The only daughter of Nicholas Claudon Jr. was Frances Goldeline Claudon (1888-1985). She married George Royal McCabe (1881-1937) in a huge wedding at Fairbury. He worked for an insurance company. The couple lived in the Peoria area their whole lives, and they had no children.

The only son of Nicholas Claudon Jr. was Chester Joseph Claudon Sr. (1884-1980). He was born in Fairbury and married Leona Carlotta James (1889-1989). She was the

daughter of Percy Chatham James Sr. (1852-1937) and Olive May Filley (1867-1955). They had two children. Chester J. Claudon Sr. initially helped his father in Fairbury with their grain business. He then became one of the pioneers of auto dealers in Central Illinois, selling Stoddard-Dayton automobiles.

Chester J. Claudon Sr.'s family and his sister's family, the McCabes, began vacationing in the wintertime in the Palm Beach, Florida, area. Both Chester J. Claudon Sr. and George R. McCabe died in the Palm Beach area.

The only son of Chester J. Claudon Sr. was Chester J. Claudon Jr. (1922-2020). He was raised in Fairbury and married Martha Ann Soldwedel (1929-2024). They had four children.

The only daughter of Chester and Leona Claudon was Virginia James Claudon. She was born in 1920 in Fairbury and attended Fairbury Township High School. According to the 1935 Crier, in her junior year in High School, she played the part of Mona, the French maid, in the play titled "Am I Intruding." Other students who appeared in this play included Betty Nussbaum, John Langstaff, John Bushman, and Bruce Barnes.

Virginia Claudon initially attended Wesley College, a women's college in Macon, Georgia. She then transferred and graduated from William and Mary College in Williamsburg, Virginia, with the Class of 1940. She volunteered to help in the Physical Therapy department of the Ream General Hospital in Palm Beach. She had a difficult time learning how to deal with severely injured American pilots.

She was then cleared for top-secret work at the Morrison Field Air Base in the intelligence office. She was saddened to learn of the death of American pilots. One day, she discovered her fiancé, Lieutenant Langdon Long, a graduate of the Citadel, had been killed when four American planes were shot down in Africa. After her fiancé was killed, she decided not to become romantically involved with anyone until the War was over. She volunteered with the Red Cross and traveled to their headquarters in Washington, DC. She decided to have four wisdom teeth pulled before she left to go overseas, and one of them became infected. Because of this infection, she had to miss the group that was sent to France.

Sent by train to California. On March 23, 1945, she left from California aboard a Navy ship with 3,100 troops and 36 female Red Cross volunteers. The ship sailed for weeks before docking in Melbourne, Australia. The ship sailed again until reaching Calcutta, India. It was under English control at that time. Living conditions were terrible, and malaria was a constant risk.

She and her friend flew on a C-47 cargo plane to Pakistan. In Karachi, she began broadcasting for 55 minutes every night to counter Tokyo Rose's broadcasts. Rumors were started that she was having an affair. To stop the rumors, she invented a story that she was engaged to James Scribner Allen (1919-1997), a man she knew from Palm Beach. A friend loaned her a small diamond engagement ring to wear. Virginia later

recounted that her ruse worked and she had no more problems with cavorting G.I.'s. She said a couple of small lies were worth it to protect her reputation.

She got word of the Japanese surrender and the end of the War. She was summoned to Calcutta to be interviewed for a role in a play. Famous movie actor Melvyn Douglas asked her to be in a Noel Coward play to entertain the troops in Calcutta. Virginia had to rely on the acting skills she had learned while performing as a Junior in a play in 1935 at Fairbury Township High School.

After the War, Virginia actually did marry James S. Allen. They had four children. In 2005, when she was 85, Virginia wrote a 22-page manuscript recounting her service with the Red Cross during World War II. She also made an oral recording for the Library of Congress describing her life and her service during the War. One can access this information at <https://tinyurl.com/23darm3t>.

In 2008, when she was 88 years old, Virginia received a commendation from the State of Minnesota for serving her country, upholding the principles of freedom, and paving the way for future generations of women in the military.

In February 2022, when she was 102, Virginia gave an interview to the Star Tribune in Minnesota. She told the reporter that the COVID pandemic was nothing compared to the conditions she experienced during World War II in India. No obituaries for Virginia Allen were found in Minnesota. If she is still alive, she is 105 years old. A copy of this article can be viewed at <https://tinyurl.com/5x37y646>.

During World War II, Fairbury had 345 men serve in the military and nine women who were nurses. In her own way, Virginia Claudon–Allen also contributed to the war effort by serving overseas with the American Red Cross and countering Tokyo Rose's radio broadcasts.



Library of Congress photo of Virginia Claudon doing her radio broadcast during World War II to offset the radio broadcasts of Tokyo Rose.